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SUBJECT: UKRAINE: TYMOSHENKO RALLIES FAITHFUL ON THE MAIDAN

Classified By: Ambassador for reasons 1.4(a,b,d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: During a rally March 23 on Kiev's Independence Square (Maidan Nezalezhnosti), the geographical and spiritual center of the late 2004 Orange Revolution, former PM Yuliya Tymoshenko strived to recreate the spirit of the November-December 2004 protests that broke the Kuchma regime's ten-year grip on power. In a rousing 50-minute speech, Tymoshenko criticized her opponents but steered clear of any personal attack against President Yushchenko. A crowd of well over 10,000 withstood icy winds and below-freezing temperatures to show support for their lady in white. With latest polls showing Tymoshenko surging to a statistical tie with Yushchenko for second place -- and with 10% of voters still undecided -- it is entirely feasible that Tymoshenko's eponymous bloc could best Our Ukraine on election day. End summary.

¶2. (U) Backed by giant video screens and flanked by the top candidates of her party, Yuliya Tymoshenko in a strong and unwavering voice told a packed Maidan of well over 10,000 (estimates ranged from 15-50,000) why people should vote for her and her bloc. Drawing on the themes of the Orange Revolution that catapulted her and Our Ukraine to power, Tymoshenko urged the voters not to give up hope or succumb to cynicism on election day. In clear phrases, Tymoshenko explained that voters should back her bloc to continue and finish the revolution that was started a year-and-a-half ago in the very same central square. (See <http://www.tymoshenko.com.ua/ukr/news/electio ns-news/2990/> for speech and visuals.)

¶3. (U) Tymoshenko leveled blistering criticism against Party of the Regions (PoR) leader Viktor Yanukovych -- characterizing him as an illiterate buffoon, liar and bandit -- and against the leaders of parties struggling to overcome the 3% barrier that would join forces with PoR. Tymoshenko singled out former Rada speaker Ivan Plyushch (who is running with ex-Orange ally Yuriy Kostenko on a joint bloc ticket), citing Plyushch as saying that he could not ignore PoR's 30% poll rating. "Who would not want to join forces with a bloc with that kind of rating?", Tymoshenko quoted him as saying. She blasted this kind of logic, saying that forming coalitions on the basis of poll ratings was dead wrong. Coalitions should be formed on the basis of policies and ideals.

¶4. (U) With regard to her own plans for a coalition, Tymoshenko side-stepped any mention of what she would do after election day. She told the crowd: "I know that many of you have asked me what my intentions are. Am I fighting against the President? Will I join forces with Our Ukraine? Is my campaign only another type of political strategy to take away votes from Our Ukraine? In the end, will I form a coalition with OU?" But she gave no clear answers. She only reiterated her clear distaste for Yanukovych and his "band of

criminals," and said she would never enter into a coalition with PoR.

¶15. (U) Tymoshenko steered clear of directly criticizing President Yushchenko, saying that he was above the parliamentary election and not running for office. Instead, it was the corrupt Our Ukraine bloc with the likes of Poroshenko, Bezsmertny, Martynenko and others who had not served the President well and were responsible for the break-up of the Orange coalition. "I did every thing I could to support our President," Tymoshenko said. "You know that I have given my all to help Ukraine become truly democratic, free and civilized." Other key points included: "A vote for PoR would take us back to the stone age. We cannot go back and we should not." "We stand on the precipice of a unique chance in history -- the kind of chance that only comes once in a lifetime. If we lose on election day, we will lose more than the 15 years of progress we have attained. We simply cannot allow that kind of 'revanche' -- the return to the criminalization prevalent during Kuchma's regime." "The PoR is nothing more than a return to that era, and we cannot let that happen." "Don't believe the sociologists, polls and what the pundits say; Make the right choice for my bloc, for democracy -- a democracy that will be crystal clear." "And don't believe anything the PoR is telling you. Their words are empty promises."

¶16. (U) Tymoshenko's impassioned oratory continued for nearly 50 minutes as icy winds whipped through the packed square. A close-up of her face was shown across the four huge video screens that flanked the stage throughout. People stood fairly quietly, with sporadic chants of "Yu-li-ya, Yu-li-ya." The rally ended with the playing of the Ukrainian national anthem -- a blue-and-yellow flag waving on the video screens -- and a 10-minute fireworks display.

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¶17. (C) Comment: Whether Tymoshenko is telling the truth or not -- and many pundits, journalists and observers call her a liar -- she remains a charismatic speaker. Employing impassioned and eloquent rhetoric, she did not miss a beat, never stumbled, spoke extemporaneously, and appeared to hit all the right points (at least with her adoring crowd). The tale of her support nationwide will be told election day by voters.

¶18. (U) Visit Embassy Kiev's classified website:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev.
Herbst